



Teaching Violence Prevention: How Much Does Bullying Weigh?

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is a prevalent problem for many elementary school students, and it is associated with physical injury and depression.¹⁻⁴ Objectives: Students engaged in this teaching activity will be able to identify bullying behaviors as well as list and demonstrate strategies to effectively deal with bullying situations. Target Audience: Fourth- and fifth-grade students.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a well-documented problem for many students in all grade levels, which typically negatively impacts their personal health and safety, particularly in the school environment.¹⁻³ Specifically, among both victims and perpetrators, bullying has been associated with indicators of poor psychosocial adjustment, such as depressive symptoms, truancy and risky behaviors.^{1,4} From a prevention perspective, intervention programs and lessons about respectful behavior should begin with young students. Concepts, such as empathy and consequences of one's actions; however, may be difficult for teachers to convey to students in elementary grade levels because they may be at varying developmental stages of concrete operations or moral realism.⁵ Based on the teaching strategy of using demonstrations,⁶ and to appeal to students' different learning styles, this activity provides a basis from which students can begin to bridge concrete actions (e.g., physical or verbal bullying) and

abstract constructs (e.g., empathy, social consequences). Additionally, strategies for handling bullying situations are included in this activity.

OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- List bullying behaviors.
- List strategies to deal with bullies.
- Demonstrate strategies to deal with bullies.

TARGET POPULATION

This lesson is designed for students in grades four and five and may be used to complement a lesson on respect and healthy relationships.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

• Pre-written bullying narrative about the life of a student who is bullied (See "Jimmy's Story" in Figure 1. Alternatively, this narrative may be rewritten with a female protagonist.)

• 10-12 marbles (The numbers of marbles used in this activity have been tested for completion of bullying narrative; however, the exact number of needed marbles may vary.)

• Thin paper napkin (approximately 12 in. x 12 in.)

• Cup of water

• Tray or towel

• Marker

• Role play examples (Figure 2)

• Worksheets (Figure 3)

• Writing utensils for group activities

• Chalk and chalkboard

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**Figure 1. Bullying Narrative: Jimmy's Story**

Jimmy was scared about starting fourth grade in a new U.S. school. His family had moved to the area over the summer, and, even though he made friends in his neighborhood, he was worried about being accepted at school. Jimmy's family was from Japan, but he had never had any problems about "looking different" because, in his previous U.S. school, there were many students who came from many different countries around the world and, therefore, not all students looked traditionally "American." Jimmy was not sure; however, if there were any Asian students at his new school.

On the first day, when the teacher came to his name as she was taking roll—James Yamamoto—he heard a few students in the class laugh. **Add one marble.** At recess, Jimmy gathered his trading cards and headed down the hall. He heard someone come up behind him, and before he knew it, his cards were knocked out of his hands, and they went flying into the air and landing all over the floor. **Add two marbles.** He turned and saw three boys laughing. One of them said, "What country did you come from, weirdo." **Add one marble.**

Jimmy replied, "I was born in California. I'm from the U.S."

"Well, you don't look like it," another boy said. They laughed and walked away.

As Jimmy picked up his cards, another student stopped to help him. **Take away a marble.** "Those guys are idiots. Here, let me help you. My name is Darius."

"Thanks," Jimmy said. He felt a little better, but he was still worried about the boys who had picked on him.

A couple of mornings later, Jimmy came into school and found that someone had drawn a picture on his desk of a person with slanted eyes. Under it were the words, "ching chong." **Add three marbles.**

Students who walked by laughed, and Jimmy tried to wipe it off, but it was permanent marker. **Add one marble.** He was too embarrassed to tell the teacher, but she already knew and told him, "I called the office and they are going to send someone right now to wash it off." **Take away a marble.**

"Thanks," Jimmy mumbled, still feeling embarrassed.

During class, an office person called to summons Mrs. Johnson. "Work on problems three through seven on page 20," she said. "And if I come back and hear any talking, the class is going to get double homework. Understood?"

When she walked out of the class, someone threw a wadded piece of paper at Jimmy. **Add one marble.** He looked back, but all of the students had their heads down. He noticed one of the boys in the back of the classroom appeared as if he was trying not to laugh, so Jimmy thought the boy must have thrown it. Jimmy ignored him and started working on the problems. Another piece of paper hit him in the head and he heard a voice say, "Open it." Jimmy didn't have to look back, because he knew it was the boy who looked as if he was trying not to laugh. He bent down and opened up the crumpled piece of paper and saw the same drawing that was on his desk, with the words "Go back to where you came from." **Add four marbles.**

This first week at school was a disaster for Jimmy. He didn't know where to go for help. If he told the teachers, the bullies may make his life even worse. After all, the teacher couldn't protect him all day at school. He was finding it harder to concentrate, and it was difficult to make friends because the other kids saw him being picked on by the bullies. All of these bad things and bad thoughts made Jimmy feel like it was raining on him all the time. He didn't know what to do. **Pour water onto the napkin; the marbles should break through.**

PROCEDURE

Allow about ten minutes to prepare the lesson (e.g., gathering materials for the demonstration), and about 45 minutes to complete it. It can be conducted over two class periods to accommodate class discus-

sion or assessment.

The teacher will begin the lesson by asking students to define bullying, and then summarize and guide students' statements to write on the chalkboard the meaning of bullying, i.e., "when a person or group of people

repeatedly [and intentionally] hurts another person with words or actions, and the person being picked on...cannot defend himself or herself."^{7(p9-10)} Discuss the three aspects of bullying (intention to harm, repeated over time and power imbalance) with students in



Figure 2. Role Play Scenarios

1. Mark got eye glasses a month ago. Since then, his classmate, Coby, has been calling him names and making fun of him wearing glasses. Almost every day, Coby calls Mark "four-eyed geek." One day at recess, Mark and some friends were playing when Coby approached him and began calling Mark names. Ask students to use the "I" message strategy in their role play.
2. Jada loves soccer. She plays with a team of children in her neighborhood. Everyone gets along well with each other except for Lori. Lori is two years older than the other kids, and she is bigger and bossy. She always wants to be in charge and always picks on the younger kids, telling them they are not good soccer players, and she pushes them on the field during practice. One day, before a game, Lori tells everyone that she will be the one to decide who will be on teams, and, if they don't like it, they can't play. Ask students to use the "stand up for self and others" strategy.
3. Jose and Ana walk to school with two to three friends each day. As they arrive at the school, they notice a window with writing on it. When they get closer, they see the words, "Jose is stupid and ugly." They see two boys they know – David and Alan – pointing and laughing at Jose. Ask students to use the "tell a trusted adult strategy in their role play.
4. Lauren and her friends are eating lunch. Ashley is sitting a few seats away from them. When the teachers are not looking, Ashley calls Lauren a pig and throws bits of food at her. All of Ashley's friends laugh, and one of them, Haley, starts throwing things at Lauren. Ask students to use the "stand up for self and others" strategy.

Figure 3. Bullying Worksheet

Instructions: After each role play has been finished, complete the boxes below. There are three boxes to complete for each role play.

| | Bullying behavior | Type of strategy used to handle the bully | Other ways to handle the bully |
|-------------|-------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Role Play 1 | | | |
| Role Play 2 | | | |
| Role Play 3 | | | |
| Role Play 4 | | | |

**Figure 4. Bullying Worksheet Answer Key (Answers may vary)**

Instructions: After each role play has been finished, complete the boxes below. There are three boxes to complete for each role play.

| | Bullying behavior | Type of strategy used to handle the bully | Other ways to handle the bully |
|-------------|--|---|---|
| Role Play 1 | name calling, making fun of someone, intention to harm | using "I" message | walking away, tell a trusted adult |
| Role Play 2 | power imbalance, making people do things they don't want to do, intention to harm | stand up for self and others | tell a trusted adult, use "I" messages |
| Role Play 3 | saying mean things, writing mean things (e.g., graffiti), intention to harm | tell a trusted adult | use humor, stand up for self and others |
| Role Play 4 | calling names, throwing things, intention to harm | stand up for self and others | tell a trusted adult, use "I" messages |

the class.⁷ Examples of each bullying aspect include the following: (1) intention to harm: "John sees Joel in the hall and, on purpose, pushes him against the wall;" (2) repeated over time: "Every few days, when they are in reading group, Cliff calls Sera a dummy;" and (3) power imbalance: "Jared, a sixth grader, always makes Michael, a third grader, give up his seat on the bus even though Michael doesn't want to move."

From the previous examples, the teacher should indicate the harm that bullying can cause for students (e. g., fear, loss of interest in school, anger, trouble sleeping, worry and physical complaints such as headache or an upset stomach).^{8,9} Ask students to think about a time in their own lives when they saw or participated in bullying or believed that someone had bullied them. Tell students they can share some examples in class but

they should not use personal names or identifiers. Call on 3-4 students who raise their hands to share their experiences.

Explain that bullying typically causes people to have many thoughts that can "feel like" something heavy is stopping them from fully living life or, in other words, bullying "weighs on their mind." Give examples of feeling "weighed down," such as "When bad things happen to you—like when someone calls you names or hits you—you feel upset, and you frequently think about the problem. Bullying may make you feel sad until the problem goes away and causes you to feel like something heavy is actually pushing on you; which is another way to feel like your body, as well as your thoughts, is weighed down." Recall examples of bullying shared earlier by students. Ask students how much they think bullying weighs on a person's mind: "Does

bullying make you feel sad, hurt, or angry? Sometimes these feelings cause you to feel weighed down because these are problems you think you cannot control."

Next, begin a discussion regarding how to deal with bullies, such as standing up for oneself and others ("Leave me alone!"); walking away (leave the area of the bully); telling a teacher or trusted adult ("Mr. Brown, may I talk with you?"); using "I" messages ("I feel bad when you call Jason names because it hurts his feelings."); or using humor ("Hey, you think I'm stupid today, but you wouldn't believe the dumb thing I did yesterday!"). Remind students that if they feel bullied and need help to stop the weighed down feelings, they should talk with a trusted adult, such as a family member, teacher, school nurse, or school counselor.



After discussing these suitable tactics for negating bullies, tell students they are going to hear a story about Jimmy, who is being bullied at school (See Figure 1 for narrative). Take an unfolded paper napkin, and explain that it represents Jimmy, the main character of the story. Use the marker to write Jimmy's name on the side of the napkin. Ask for two volunteers to assist in the activity; each student will hold a side of the napkin over the tray or towel. Explain that the marbles represent negative actions that can weigh a person down by making him/her feel sad or hurt. Demonstrate, by adding a marble on the center of the napkin that causes the napkin to sink a bit in the middle under the weight of the marble.

Begin reading the bullying narrative to students in the class (Figure 1). As noted throughout the bullying narrative, the teacher will add marbles to the napkin for each bullying event that happens to Jimmy. As indicated in the narrative, remember to add more marbles for more severely negative actions, show students that, depending on the person, some actions can be more hurtful than others. When something positive happens, take a marble away to illustrate how the load is lightened (i.e., "When someone helps you, you feel better."). If the napkin breaks before the end of the story, start the discussion (see next paragraph) at that point. If the napkin does not break, end the bullying story by saying, "And all the bad things that happened caused Jimmy to feel like it was raining on him all the time." Pour water over the marbles, and the napkin should break.

Begin a discussion with students by reviewing the definition of bullying, recalling the definition written on the chalkboard. Review the three aspects of bullying (intention to harm, repeated and over time, and power imbalance). Discuss with students what happened in each step (i.e., each addition of marbles) of the bullying story and

why it happened. Ask students, "Did you notice that, when Jimmy was bullied, he felt weighed down as demonstrated by the marbles sinking on the napkin. What happened when someone treated him in a kind and respectful way? There was less pressure Jimmy and that made him feel better." Ask students how the story could have been different to make Jimmy feel better and less weighed down. If students have difficulty thinking of suggestions, recall strategies discussed earlier, such as "I" messages or telling a trusted adult.

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

Students should be placed into groups, and the teacher should review with students the class rules for group work, such as cooperation, no loud talking, and so on. Provide each group with a bullying role play scenario that includes a resolution strategy and have them develop their own skit based on the scenario (Figure 2). Allow time for students to create, rehearse and perform their skits in front of the class. Prior to beginning role plays, distribute the Bullying Worksheet to each student (Figure 3). After each role play, ask students to write on their worksheet the bullying behaviors they saw in each skit and which type of strategy was used in each skit. Worksheets may be completed individually or in groups. Then, ask students for other types of strategies that could have been used in the scenario (e.g., "I" messages, telling a trusted adult, using humor), and require them to complete the corresponding boxes on the worksheet. An answer key is provided in Figure 4; students' answers likely will vary for the "Bullying Behavior" and "Other ways to handle the bully" columns.

A grading system can be applied to the worksheet by using a point system derived from the number of correctly completed boxes out of the 12 total boxes on the worksheet (e.g., $9/12 = 75\%$). Students should

have at least one answer for each box. The worksheet can also be reviewed in class and used for additional discussion with students to share their thoughts and ideas about each role play.

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